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ABSTRACT

Nine units help junior high school students critically examine the influence of television on their lives. Topics covered are: the role of television in one's life, television's presentation of reality, commercials, program production, conflict on television, heroes and models, relationships, problems and solutions in television shows, and student selection of programs to watch. Each unit contains a reading, discussion questions, and a number of suggested activities. Illustrations accompany all materials. (LP)

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THE MEDIA MIRROR

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United States Catholic Conference

National Catholic Educational Association

THE MEDIA MIRROR:

A Study Guide on Christian Values and Television

Junior High

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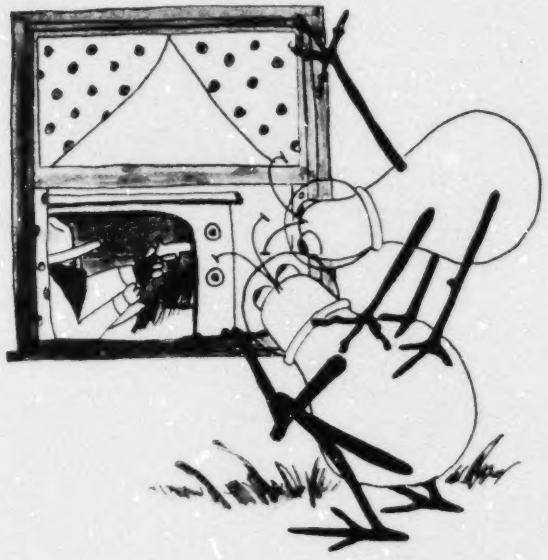
1. What Is Television

A Channel to Life (?)

The aliens are coming. Suppose your favorite outer space character was making its first trip to earth and stopped by your house one night just after supper. Imagine the scene. Everyone is sitting around the room with their attention glued to images moving across the front of a box. The alien is puzzled.



"What is this behavior?," it asks.

"Oh, we're just watching a program," you reply, trying to stay cool.

"But what's that thing?"

After a long silence you suddenly realize it's not going to be so easy to make this alien understand television.

"Can you stay for a few days?," you ask, wondering to yourself where you are going to begin.

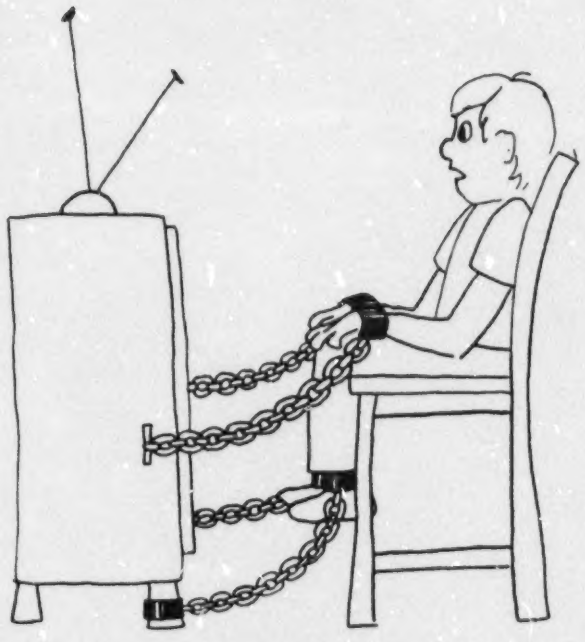
Television has become a permanent fixture in the living rooms of homes across our land. But it wasn't always so. At one time television itself was the alien which came upon a family scene quite different than today's. Even your parents may remember the pre-television era or the early days of TV. Now television is almost like a member of the family. As such, TV influences what a family is and what it does. Given the extreme amount of time and attention family members give to TV, that is both for better and for worse.

According to one study by a major university, 20% of young children preferred TV to their own mothers, and 46% preferred it to their fathers. That is due to the fact that children watch TV an average of 30 hours a week, or 1,560 hours every year. A child spends one-third of his or her waking hours watching television. By the time the average child enters kindergarten, he or she has already spent more hours learning about the world from TV than she/he would spend in a classroom earning a college degree.

But statistics certainly do not tell the whole story of TV in this country. This modern invention is a giant communications system linking people and places far and near. It has become our window to the world. There are television events that remain with viewers for a lifetime—the wedding of a prince and princess, the funeral of a statesman, the tragedy of an airliner crash, the triumph of a space launch, the agony of war in a country close or far away.

Television is also an electronic mirror reflecting our lives and our cultures. TV presents news and opinions, ideas and learning, customs and traditions, imagination and entertainment, lifestyles and values. It brings us information as well as enjoyment. Some programs, however, just waste the time we could spend on something more worthwhile. Other programs create distorted or false impressions of the world and people.

Just how important is television in *your* life? Former President Jimmy Carter once called someone in Iowa to ask his opinion about an important national concern. He was trying to contact the "average person" for comments. When he got through, the President was told to call back later because the party was watching television and didn't want to be inter-



rupted. Can you believe someone would actually do that to the President of the United States? It's true!

The television is only an electronic machine, a communications tool at our disposal. We have the intelligence and the right to be in control. Sometimes, however, TV seems to control us. People complain about not having enough free time to do all the things they would like, yet they devote many hours to TV. Often daily schedules are planned around particular programs. You may know people who would rather spend hours in front of the tube than a few minutes with friends.

In today's world it is natural for most of us to watch television. Some of us spend many hours; others seldom turn TV on. The purpose of the *Media Mirror* is to help make this natural activity more conscious and constructive for you. This study will not focus just on what is wrong with television. It will also emphasize the positive and practical aspects of how to select, appreciate and benefit from what the medium has to offer. As a form of one-way communication, television can be a very passive experience. But it can also be used in an active, helpful way to enrich our lives.

Why study about television? Your alien friend may be able to provide an answer after a week of intense observation. But would you? We are going through a technological revolution. We are so close to it that it is difficult for us to see its effects on our daily lives. It is good for us to stand back to look at how we are using our video invention and to evaluate the enormous impact of television on our society. You have this opportunity now—to study that familiar electronic picture box and yourself as a member of the TV generation.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of your favorite TV programs? What is it that you like about them? What kind of programs do you dislike the most? Why?
2. Describe how you felt the last time your TV set went on the blink? How did you fill the time without it?
3. How important do you feel TV is for you? It's so easy to flip on the television set and watch it for hours. Suppose your TV was located in a closet and you had to take it out and plug it in each time you wanted to watch it. Or suppose you had to pay your weekly allowance for the privilege of watching TV. Would either of these situations change your TV viewing habits? How?
4. Imagine that you could design a room that would be perfect for watching TV. What would it look like? Where would it be located? Describe it to the class.
5. What are the 10 favorite activities of the students in your class? Where does TV rank on that list? If you had to choose one of those activities to replace television viewing in your life for one year, what would you choose? Would you consider doing an experiment like this? Why or why not?
6. Communication and community come from the same original word. How are their meanings similar? Does TV as a medium of communication help create a sense of community among people? Why or why not? How is "TV community" different than other types of community you experience: your family, your neighborhood, your school, your parish on Sunday morning?

Activities

1. Ask your parents or some adult what it was like growing up in the early days of television or before TV was invented. What did they do with their free time? You may want to tape the responses and play them for the class.

2. Keep a log of the programs you watch for a week. Use the form provided by your teacher. Compare your TV watching with the other kinds of activities you did during the week. Are you surprised by the results? What times during the day did you watch TV the most? How did your weekday and weekend viewing habits differ?

3. About 2% of the families in the U.S. do not own a TV set. Most have no set because they choose not to own one. Do you know anyone like this? If so, interview them and report back to the class.

4. Start a TV scrapbook. Look for articles, cartoons, ads, photos in newspapers and magazines which comment on television and its effect on our lives. Write in your own observations, reactions and ideas. Draw your own cartoons and artwork. Create a cover for the scrapbook that tells the story of TV in your family. Keep adding to this scrapbook as you have new TV experiences and find new material.

5. Try an experiment. For one day or one week: DO NOT WATCH TV. Keep a journal of your feelings and what you did instead of seeing TV. Share the results with your class. A group of young people did just this and published their diaries in the book *Listen to Us* (Dorriet Kavanaugh, ed., Workman Publishing Company). Look for this book in your school/parish or public library and compare it with your diary.

6. Conduct a debate using the following statement: Seventh- and eighth-graders spend all day in school learning. They should be allowed to relax and enjoy as much TV as they want in the afternoons and on weekends.

7. Do a report for the class called "TV is a Member of the Family." Base it on your discussions with class and family members. Some areas to consider: the effect of TV on eating/sleeping habits, attitudes of family toward TV, the number of sets and the number of family members.

- 98% of American homes (83.3 million) have at least one TV.
- Most of the remaining 2% have made a deliberate choice not to have one.
- More Americans own TV sets than have indoor bathrooms.
- 45% of the population watches TV as it eats dinner.
- The TV set is on in the average home 6 hours and 44 minutes every day.
- Children spend more time watching TV than doing anything else except sleeping and attending school.

2. Varieties Of Reality

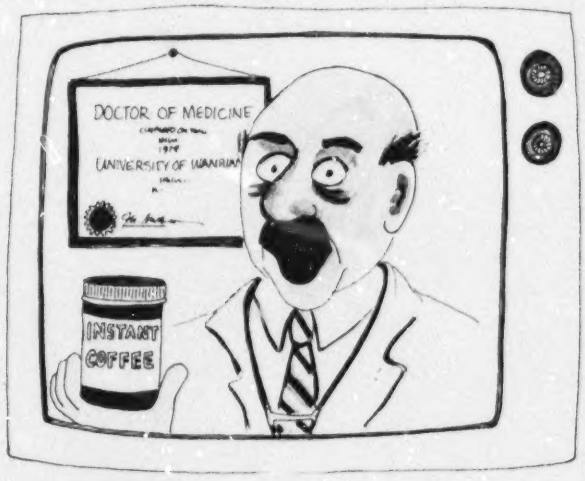
Is It the Real Thing?

Imagine a world where poor grades are always raised, parking spaces are always found, teachers and parents are—ultimately—always understanding. Imagine a world where crime never pays, hard work always pays, and doctors never refuse to make house calls.

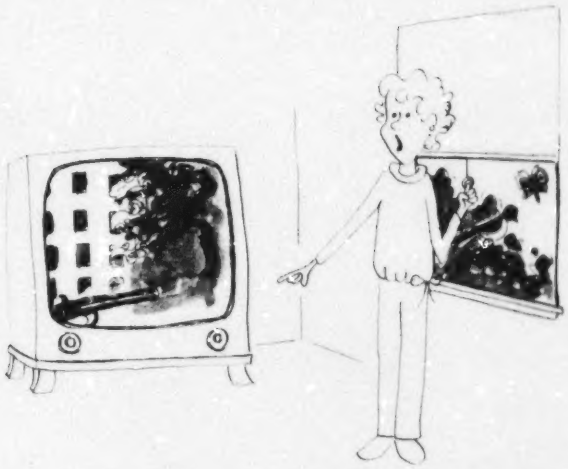
Now imagine a world where 50% of the people are victims of violence. Imagine a world where more parents are divorced or widowed than married. Imagine a world where 20% of the workers are police or detectives. Imagine a world where 60% of the people are male.

Both worlds are imaginary yet real, for they exist—on television. The first world is rose-colored; the second, dark and grim.

Television is a world in which fantasy and fact are mixed, a world which sometimes makes us feel good, sometimes frightened. We see clothes, cars, rooms and furniture like ours. We see characters who are like us or our family, friends and neighbors. But looking at TV is like looking in a fun-house mirror: We see in a distorted way. We often expect our world to be like TV. For example, we expect our doctors to cure us of all our ills and to comfort us. We expect our doctors to be like Gonzo Gates and Trapper John in "Trapper John, M.D." Doctors sometimes call it the "Marcus Welby Syndrome," named because of that enormously popular program. Dr. Welby, played by Robert Young, was understanding, competent and close to perfect and yet he seemed real. In fact, many viewers



Abe Vigoda starred as Fish on "Barney Miller," while former pro football standout Ed Marinaro is cast as Officer Joe Coffey on "Hill Street Blues," two of the most popular recent police dramas.



wrote to Dr. Welby for medical advice. Robert Young was so strongly identified as Dr. Welby that he was hired to do the Sanka commercial. Do you know why?

Why is it so difficult to see the differences between fact and fantasy on TV? One reason is that many shows contain elements of reality—even those that are science fiction, such as "Knight Rider," or filled with fantastic stunt scenes such as the "A-Team." They are based on thoughts and actions that could possibly happen. If we look beyond the fantasy and science fiction, all programs teach us something about our world. They often bring to mind the struggle between good and evil. They show the feelings of people. But because the time is only 30 to 60 minutes, they don't give us the entire picture. In real life, similar problems may be there, such as peer pressure or winning a game, but they aren't solved so quickly or simply.

We do turn to television to inform us about the real world. Yet news shows are blending more and more entertainment into their presentations. In addition, the selection of the film clips, the words and tone of voice of the announcers, and the interviews with "eyewitnesses" or "experts" give the news shows a slant or bias. If a news show presents a film clip of a fist fight at a rock concert, what impression would you and your parents form? Yet it may have been the only problem at a concert attended by 10,000 people. Walter Cronkite, now retired, always ended the CBS "Nightly News" with the words, "That's the way it is." Was it? Or was it the way the CBS news team saw events?

TV has presented many mini-series in the past few years that are based on historical people, facts and places, but the writer filled in the details and added dialogue. Fact and fiction are blended, events are made more exciting, characters are added or ignored. These docu-dramas entertain us. It is hard to tell what is real and what is fiction when you see a docu-drama. *Roots*, an immediate classic, was watched by millions. "Eleanor and Franklin," "Holocaust," "John F. Kennedy" are all samples of docu-dramas. If you saw any of these, could you separate the fact from the fiction? Most would find it hard to do.

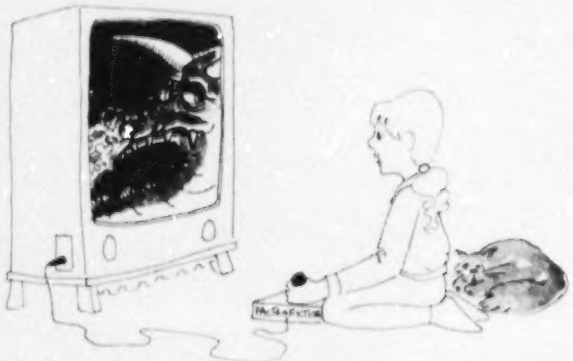
Sometimes TV raises our expectations. We want life to be smooth and we want to solve our problems quickly. We want our friends to stand by us as they do on TV despite the ups and downs of all friendships. We want our world to be pleasant.

On the other hand, TV sometimes makes us fearful of our world. We fall into the trap of thinking that seeing is believing. We begin to believe that muggings, murders, rapes and assaults are more common than they really are. As a consequence of this distorted view of reality, many people take on a negative attitude, a sense of hopelessness and fear. Sometimes we forget about all the people who are trying to live a Christian lifestyle.

When you watch TV, remember some things are factual. They really did happen. The news would be an example. Other shows take a possible situation and work a story around it. They are fiction, but they could happen. Docu-dramas take a factual situation and fill in the gaps to make an interesting story. Next time you watch TV, ask yourself: What is this—fact, fiction, some of each? Is it real?

Discussion Questions

1. Name one of your favorite shows and describe why you like it. Is it realistic or unrealistic? Does it paint a rose-colored picture of the world or a grim, dark picture? Is the plot believable, the characters realistic?
2. What programs do your parents like? Why? What programs do your parents like which you dislike? Why? When you watch TV with your parents, or with your family, what kind of conversations do

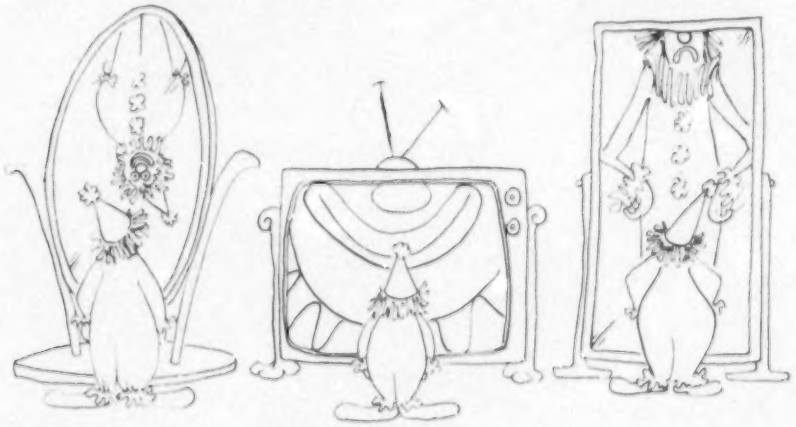


you have? Do you prefer to watch TV alone or with someone? Do you ever discuss the shows while they are on or say such things as "He'd never do that?"

3. What are the pros and cons of docu-dramas? What is the responsibility of the TV producers and writers in presenting the truth? What are the responsibilities of the viewer?
4. In what ways does TV present a true picture of life in the United States? In what ways does it paint a false picture?
5. Soap opera fans sometimes say that the soaps are more realistic than prime time shows or situation comedies. Do you agree or disagree? What is the most true-to-life soap? The most exaggerated? Do you like the soaps? Why are they so popular? If we picked five gospel values such as love, faithfulness, mercy, forgiveness, peacemaking, could you find examples of these in the soaps? Could you find soaps where the people never live these values? What does this say about the people on the soaps and the lives they live? Do real people have the same problems? How would you change the stories and characters to bring these gospel values into the soaps?
6. In the movie "Network" the character Howard Beale, a TV newscaster, says, "You're beginning to think TV is the reality and your own lives aren't real." Do you ever feel like that? Do your friends? Do you think TV influences the way you see the real world?

Activities

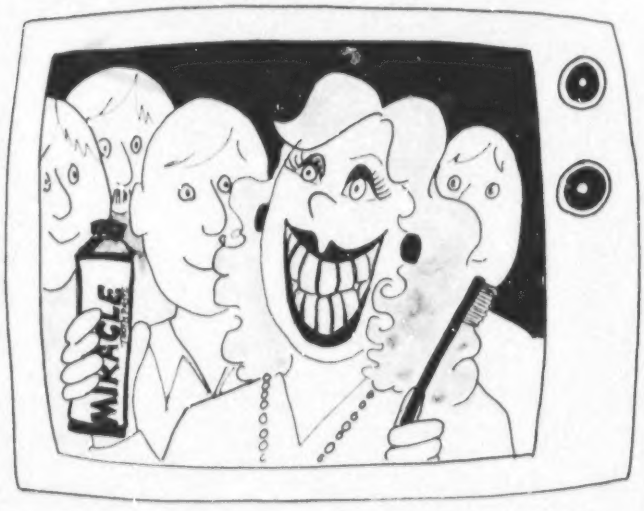
1. Divide the class into groups and ask each group to watch a different nightly news program. What was the lead or first story presented and how long was it? If possible, listen to the nightly news show for one week. How often was the lead story about a disaster such as a fire, shooting, threat of war?
2. Compare the lead story on the nightly TV news show with the same story as reported in the newspaper. Was the story in the headlines? Was it on the front page or buried in the paper? In what ways were the stories the same? In what ways were they different?
3. List the occupations of the characters you regularly see on TV. How is the job presented? For example, does it seem difficult, easy, dangerous, glamorous? Describe the bosses.
4. Ask a fighter, journalist or police officer to speak to the class about his or her job and how it is portrayed on TV. Or interview an adult about his or her job. How is the job presented on TV, or is it "invisible" on TV?
5. If your community had refugees from another country, what would they learn from TV about the following:
   - People over 60
   - Reporters
   - Clothes women wear
   - Most important things in our lives
   - New York
   - High school students
   - Religion
6. Have three to five volunteers stage a melodramatic incident such as a shooting or an argument. (Do not tell the class when the skit will occur.) Then ask the students to write down what they witnessed and ask them to compare their "eyewitness" accounts. For added fun, use props and stage clothes.
7. Look up the following terms in the dictionary: fact, history, fiction, news documentaries, drama, fantasy and science fiction. Define these terms and discuss their relationship to each other. Refer to the TV log you kept with the first unit. Identify each show with the categories that may fit it. Example: "M*A*S*H" could have elements of fact, drama, history, fiction and perhaps fantasy.



3. COMMERCIALS

This Show Is Brought to You by. . .

It is estimated that by the time you reach the age of 17, you will have seen more than 350,000 commercials. Why are there so many 30- and 60-second advertising messages? The reasons are simple: Television programs are very expensive to produce and transmit, and television advertising is very profitable. For the opportunity to reach millions of viewers at one time, advertisers sometimes pay as much as $400,000 for a 30-second spot. But TV commercials sell products and the advertisers know they will get back their huge investments. Commercials also provide the large profits most television networks make each year.

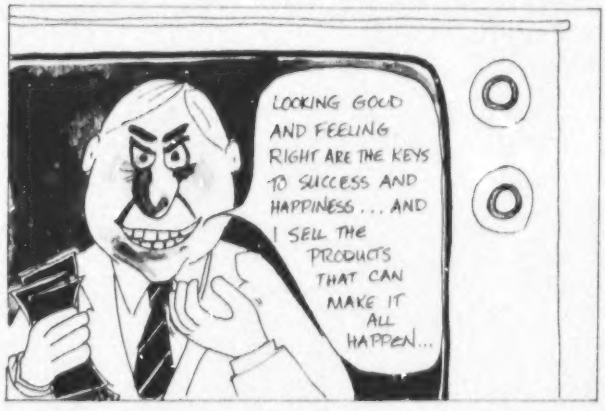


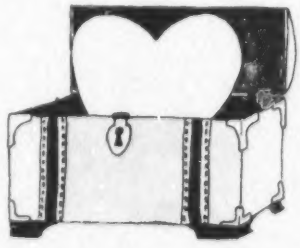
These short messages not only influence our buying habits, but they also have a profound effect on our overall attitudes and behavior. Cosmetic commercials, for example, not only sell certain products but they attempt to define our concept of beauty and tell us what to expect if we look like the model. Beer commercials try to give us the image of man as the "macho male" and to tell us how men should relate to each other and to women. Like all TV programs, the commercials have a point of view, some particular way of looking at life. In many commercials the most important message is not what is said but what is implied between the lines. How do *you* spell relief?

Commercials are very cleverly done by some of the highest paid professionals in the business. In the space of a few seconds, they communicate an entire message, painlessly but persuasively. The message is simple: Buy this product. However, few commercials say this directly. The message is hidden behind captivating images that move in rapid succession, backed by catchy theme music. A commercial sells its product by associating it with qualities that people admire or desire. The toothpaste ad implies that if you use this particular brand you will never have to worry about having dates. Or, if you drive this make of car you will be respected by your friends and neighbors.

Watching commercials, you could conclude that everything is for sale. Buy the right products, these ads say, and you can become attractive, accepted, successful, rich, powerful. Commercials imply that you can buy happiness. Commercials sell a value that says our happiness depends on the kind and quality of products we possess. Put another way, much of television advertising leaves us with the message that things are more important than people. It can even make us feel that we are not worthwhile unless we have certain things.

Our Christian faith gives us a different perspective on who we are. Jesus came to reveal the love of the





"WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE IS YOUR HEART"

Father for each one of his children. It doesn't matter what they have, or what they wear, how they look, the house they live in, the car they drive, the deodorant they use or where they go on vacation. What is important is the gift of life itself. How we use our individual gifts in love and service of other people is the honor we pay to our loving Creator. God has first loved us and we return that love by following the values of his son, Jesus Christ.

Commercial television seems to provide the public with free entertainment. But there is a price to pay, not only in the money we spend to buy the products that are advertised but in allowing ourselves to buy into the false values hidden in the ads. Commercials are a form of propaganda and a powerful means of persuasion. The wise viewer is one who understands how commercials communicate and the kind of influence they can have. This is the person who not only critically evaluates the product advertised, but who analyzes the hidden consumer values by the light of Christian faith.

Discussion Questions

1. "Advertising presents a true picture of products of well-known companies." Do you agree with this statement? Why?
2. Billions of dollars are invested each year in television commercials because advertisers believe that they work. Why do you suppose there is such a strong feeling about the effectiveness of 30- and 60-second messages? Have you ever purchased a product because you saw it on TV?
3. What is the cleverest ad on television right now? Why do you like it? What is its appeal and how does it tie its product to that appeal? Is it honest?

4. Proctor and Gamble, one of the companies that advertises the most on television, suggests that there are four basic questions to ask yourself in analyzing ads. Do you agree with these: 1) What does the ad promise me? 2) Does the promise meet my wants, needs or interests? 3) Do I need more information? Where can I get it? 4) Is the advertiser reputable? Where can I check?
5. Read these passages from the Bible: Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:16-21; Mark 8:34-38. Discuss their meaning. How do they relate to television commercials and consumer values? For example, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart." How does the materialism which ads promote conflict with Christian values?
6. Public television does not have commercials like those on commercial TV. How, then, is public television financed? How much public TV do you watch? What kinds of programs? Does the lack of commercials make a difference in your viewing these programs? Explain.
7. Do you recall seeing any spot messages on TV that do not promote commercial products or services? Many of these fall into the category of public service announcements. Make a list of some you have seen. What do they attempt to do? How do they differ from commercial advertising?

Activities

1. Ask your parents why they buy certain brands of products. Have commercials ever convinced them to try another brand?
2. Pick one television commercial and analyze it by answering the following questions about it: What does the ad say? What does it promise? What does it imply? What words are used to describe the product? What images are used? What reasons does the ad suggest for buying the product?
3. Often commercials include jingles or slogans. Why do advertisers use these? Prepare a list of current jingles/slogans for the class to guess or prepare a cassette tape of them without brand names. Quiz the class. Here are a few for starters: "4 out of 5 doctors recommend ___", "We're ___, doing what we do best." "Sooner or later, you'll own ___", "___ it's the real thing."
4. There are many persuasive advertising techniques. Some are listed below. Either individually or in small groups, find examples of commercials that demonstrate each technique. Some techniques are: Camera closeup; special sound effects; special lighting effects; jingle/slogan; use of celebrities to endorse products; words like "new" or "improved"; scientific-sounding words; promises;

brand loyalty; bandwagon—"everybody's doing it;" stacking the deck—"no other way."

5. Keep track of all the TV commercials you view today (after school or evening). Make a chart of what you see. On the left side of the chart list each commercial by the time period it is shown (i.e., 7:00-7:30, 7:30-8:00). On the right side of the chart, group the ads according to categories or kinds of products (i.e., cars, games, services, food). What conclusions can you draw from the kinds of products that are advertised most and the time periods in which they are shown?
6. There are two basic types of breaks on commercial TV: the commercial ad and the public service announcement.
   a. Working in teams, create a commercial ad to sell the people of your community on your school or parish. Your commercial should be persuasive. Use props, words, images, jingles or whatever else is needed.
   b. Read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-11). Pick out one beatitude that interests you and says something important for your life. Working in teams make and perform a public service announcement that will tell your class the message of the beatitude in a convincing way. Which project did you like doing best? Why? How were they alike and different?

It costs an advertiser between $100,000 and $200,000 to place a one-minute commercial on a prime time TV show. The most expensive advertising time is on the Super Bowl: $400,000 per half minute.

The major TV advertisers spend millions of dollars each year to purchase commercial time. For example, all the makers of soft drinks together spend more than $300 million annually. One manufacturer of household products alone spends more than $560 million.

The total national price tag for advertising is in excess of $61 billion. That costs every family an average of $718 every year, which is added into the price of the products it buys.

4. Anatomy of a Program

It's a Credit to Everyone

"M*A*S*H" was one of the most popular shows ever produced. When it was announced during the spring of 1983 that the last "M*A*S*H" show would be a special two-hour presentation, people all around the world responded. Thousands of "M*A*S*H" parties were held. Some people came to the "M*A*S*H" events dressed as their favorite "M*A*S*H" character.

A teenage girl wrote to a cable network and asked, "Do you think that there will ever be an all-'M*A*S*H' channel?" When questioned, "You mean 24 hours a day?," she replied, "Well, just the waking hours would do." Why do so many people watch "M*A*S*H" repeatedly? Do you know that in some cities in the United States you can see "M*A*S*H" three times a day? Why is "M*A*S*H" one of the most popular and profitable series in the history of TV?

One of the reasons is the people involved. There are many elements that go into making a television program. Producers, directors, scriptwriters, actors and technicians are key people. Perhaps "M*A*S*H" was so successful because all of these people worked together so well. They produced a series that attract millions of viewers each time it's aired.

Every TV program has a producer, a person who spends money to hire all the people involved. This talent includes the director, the actors, the dozens of people behind the camera and, most importantly, the scriptwriter. All productions start with an idea that is turned into the words of the script. The director then translates the words into visual images. The editor then assembles the pictures into scenes that should flow effortlessly across the screen. The results vary from the truly awful to the mostly mediocre to the occasionally excellent. The excellent, like "M*A*S*H," stand out from the majority of the run-of-the-mill shows that are ground out season after season.

The people who made "M*A*S*H" each week worked together as a unit for many years. During rehearsals, they all contributed ideas to improve the script and the action. Most other shows do not have such unity behind the camera. As we know from "M*A*S*H," when there is unity, the viewer can sense it. The next time you watch a show, think about how well the people behind the camera have done their jobs. Did they work as a team or as individuals?

GOOD SHOWS START WITH GOOD SCRIPTS!

Discussion Questions

1. "M*A*S*H" seemed like an unlikely series to be such a hit. It prolonged the Korean war at a time when people didn't want to think about war. Why do you suppose millions were attracted to the show anyway?
2. The Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (M*A*S*H) unit deals with the sufferings and tragedy of war with a great deal of humor. Does having a sense of

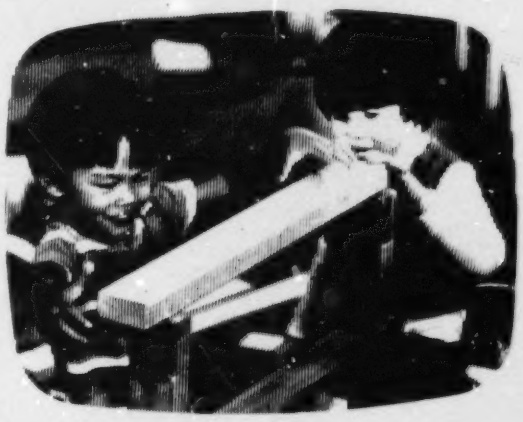
humor seem important to you? Why? How do you think the personal relationships of the actors off camera affected the humor portrayed on camera?

3. Of the new shows that have been introduced this TV season, which ones do you think are well produced? Do any of them compare with "M*A*S*H" in quality and popularity? Which ones will last and why? What do you think went wrong with the shows that you are sure will get cancelled?
4. Is teamwork always the best way to work with others? What role does a leader play in a team situation? Does the leadership role necessarily imply having to be number one? If you are not number one are you a loser? Discuss these concepts of competition and cooperation. How do these concepts relate to TV programs, church committees, to your family, to your life?

Activities

1. Ask your parents their evaluation of "M*A*S*H". Do they have some favorite programs they would consider equal in quality to this successful series?
2. The Christophers, a Catholic organization, gives out awards each year for superior movies and TV programs. The director stated the criteria this way: "We look for works which affirm the highest values of the human spirit, which exhibit artistic and technical proficiency and attain a significant degree of public acceptance." What does he mean? As a rule, only TV specials are honored but in 1981 the rule was broken and "M*A*S*H" was saluted. During the coming weeks of this television study, be alert to some possible TV shows (series or specials) that you feel meet the qualifications above. As a class decide which programs deserve awards. Share your suggestions with The Christophers, 12 East 48th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.
3. Imagine you are a successful, talented TV producer. NBC, the lowest-rated network, comes to you pleading for a sure-fire hit for its fall schedule. What kind of show would you produce? Whom would you hire as stars? To what audience would you want to appeal? Write down some ideas and

Humanity's Greatest Story—



Humanity's greatest story is the heart of Christianity. It is a story of life and death, of sin and forgiveness. It is, most of all, a story of unending love.

Yet, too often, those with far less compelling stories invest the greatest time in seeking out an audience—reaching people where they live, and work, and relax—through modern media—while the church has relied on its pastors and priests to deliver Christ's message of love and hope in weekly doses.

By supporting the Catholic Communication Campaign, you can help reduce this inequity.

You can help proclaim the message of love to everyone in every tongue.

United States Catholic Conference
Catholic Communication Campaign

7

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then share them with the class. If you have time and the facilities, videotape the production once you have hired a director, actors, writers, etc. from the class.

4. After the class discussion on teamwork vs. competition, write about a situation in which either teamwork or competition can take place. Write two endings for the situation, one in which teamwork is used, the other in which competition takes place. Share these with your class.

Word Find

Below are listed 40 terms that deal with television programs. They are listed vertically, horizontally, diagonally and upside down, forwards and backwards. Find as many as you can. Join in groups of two or three and together try to find all the terms.

S L P M O U V A L U E S F T A L E N T V Z Y
T I C R A T E C H N I C A L D I R E C T O R
A G H E O A D I R E C T O R U E D A X W E W
G H O G B D C E O D I H G T C I M Y Z R P X
I T R A M L U K T J P T S O T E S B E A A S
N I E N N R O C C U P O R O R E R T T U T V
G N O A P E Q R E I U D R A I Q I S N C E O
D G G M R T U K R R M G F R O R V S E T A V
I E R N O P A C I L A F E I W T D F T E M V
R N A O V M S K D L O S F T L N F T W L W E
E G P I S O O S T K E E P I A E V T O E O L
C I H T C R U P N D A I S H L Z Y O R V R E
T N E C J P N O A C R V E A B M W L K I K T
O E R U E E D N T C T G I C A V X I T S T O
R E F D I L J S S P A C T R E S S P O I V S
E R H O F E E O I T E D I T I N G R V O S S
N V W R I T E R S P E M I C R O P H O N E U
I I E P L S I H S L A S R A E H E R M N O L
G D D O R O T C A Z O N A N E D O S I P E A
I E E L B A C R E E N I G N E O I D U A S V
C O S T U M E D E S I G N D O E G N O B C S

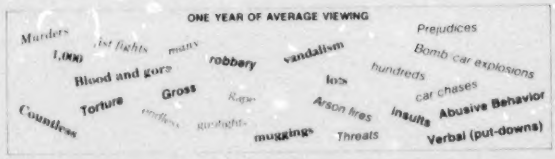
actor
actress
assistant director
audio engineer
cable
camera
choreographer
costume design
director
editing
editor
episode
film
lighting engineer
make-up
microphone
network
pilot
producer
production manager
record
rehearsals
script
scriptwriter
series
set
sound
special effects
sponsor
stage hands
staging director
talent
tape
teamwork
technical director
teleprompter
television
values
video
writer

5. Conflict

Settling Our Differences

How would you describe life without conflict and excitement? BORING! Right? TV programs are built around a conflict or struggle. This is natural because conflict is a part of life. We clash with people, we overcome obstacles, we fight against nature, and we are disappointed when we don't get our way or lose a game. We can deal with these conflict situations in various ways.

On TV shows the most common ways to resolve a conflict are through action and violence. In a study of TV shows 75% contained some form of violence. Sometimes the violence is necessary and appropriate. In the Civil War mini-series, "The Blue and the Gray," the battle scenes were part of the experience. However, in other TV shows, the violence is meant to keep our attention when the plot is weak. Violence can be used by a writer for "cheap thrills," not because the story calls for it but to keep our interest. For example, crime occurs 10 times more often on TV than it does in real life. What programs are dependent on action and violence instead of well-written stories and strong characters?

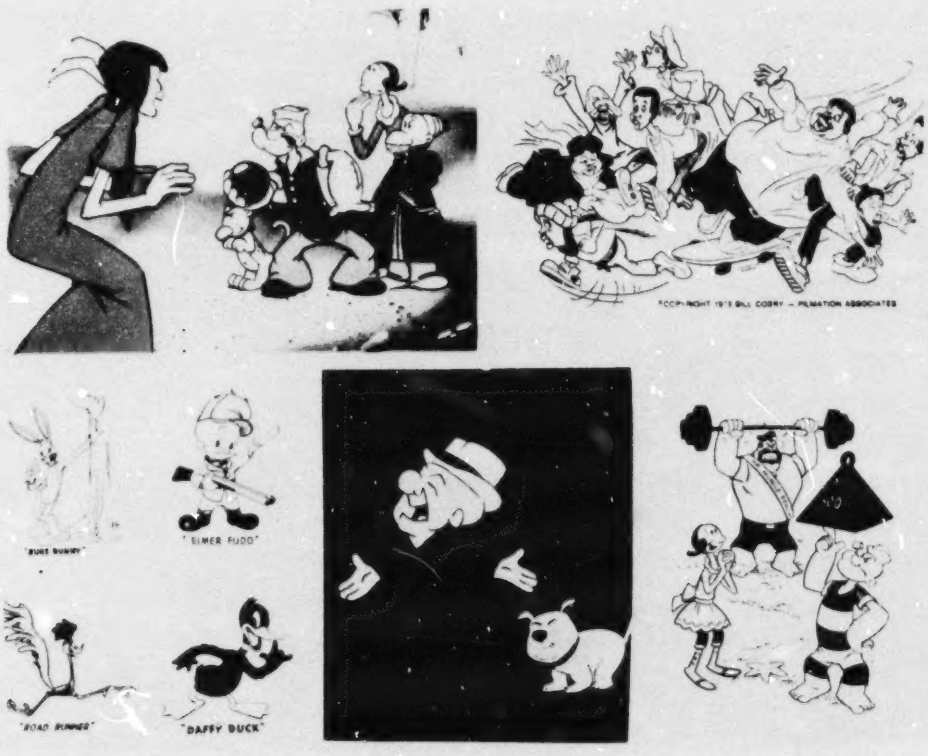


Surgeon General of the U.S. reports that the more violence a younster sees on TV, the more aggressive he/she is likely to become in attitude and action.

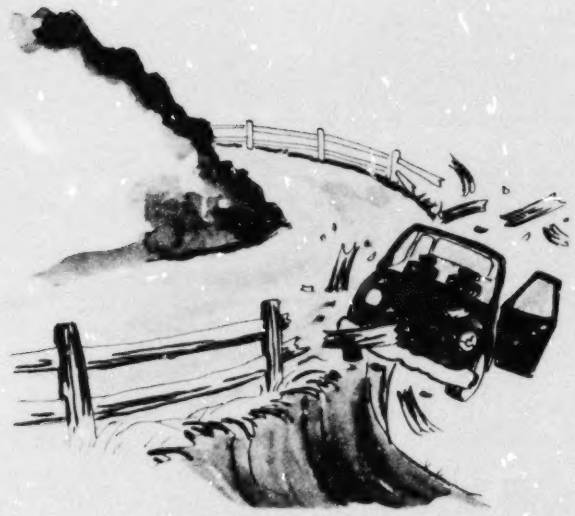
By age 15, the average viewer has witnessed 13,000 violent deaths.

James Garner played the role of Jim Rockford on the private detective show "The Rockford Files." Rockford was often struck on the head, his car was run off the road, he was punched and bashed. But he was never more than stunned and never seriously hurt.

In real life, in an interview, Garner said, "I've had three knee operations, broke a bone in my spine, broke ribs, knuckles, all kinds of dislocations and sprains, torn ligaments and tendons." And he only performed the less hazardous stunts. His double did the dangerous stunts.



Many parents and TV critics label cartoons as violent. What do you think about this?



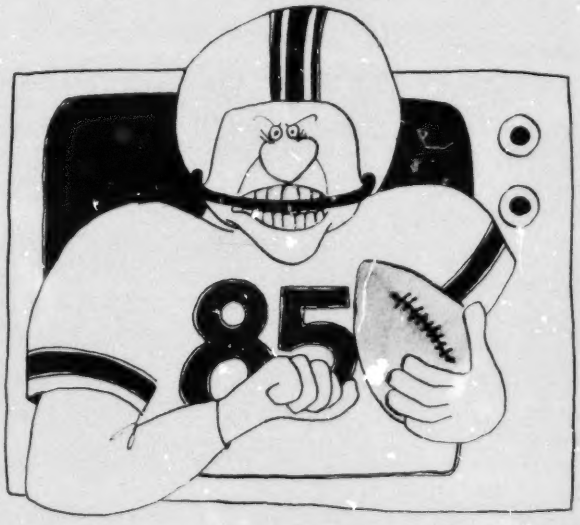
The action and violence on TV is faked by trained men and women who use special equipment and techniques to create the illusion of real fights and real car chases. For example, the stunt double uses props made out of light weight balsa wood (the wood used for model airplanes) or styrofoam when they hit each other over the head with chairs, boards and other objects. The sound of wood splitting is dubbed in later.

Stunt men and women create the illusion of danger and violence, but do the stunt as safely as possible. They wear protective clothing, rig cars that can withstand roll-overs, and put in hours of practice.

One way of showing conflict is through rugged physical action and violence. Another way of developing conflict in a plot is through inner struggles and personal decisions. For example, C.J. on "Matt Houston" knows her friend is not dealing drugs. The evidence is clearly there, but C.J. goes by her instincts and tries to clear the name of her friend.

Inner conflicts are very complex when they revolve around important but opposing values. For example, when a police officer learns that his or her partner is taking bribes, he or she is faced with turning in the partner and breaking the unwritten code among police officers.

Defense attorneys face difficult choices when confronted with criminals whom they know are guilty



but whom they can "get off" because of a technicality in the law. Should defense attorneys do their jobs or not?

Often inner conflicts on TV are easily solved. The police officer taking the bribes resigns or the criminal is found guilty of a second crime and goes to jail. The person with the conflict is "let off the hook." In whatever way the conflict is solved, good invariably triumphs over bad, except on the soaps where characters like J.R. are so "evil" they don't worry about inner struggles of right and wrong.

A third area of conflict on TV and in our lives is sports and games. We all want to win. Winning becomes very important, and we will do almost anything to win. We hear about sports figures that get hooked on drugs and need pain shots before games, just to keep playing. The desire to win is so great they will do almost anything. We see grown-ups fighting and showing poor manners in sports. Sometimes the inner pressure to win causes them to lose sight of the fun sports can be and the need for good sportsmanlike conduct. Our desire to win needs to be balanced with fair play, good teamwork, and respect for others. Too often, we witness the immature behavior of some figures on TV. They are not able to balance the various conflicts in their lives or accept mistakes and defeat. So, they strike out at others. Can you think of some sports figures who are notorious for this?

Conflict is part of real life. But we have to learn to deal with it in a constructive way. Conflict can make a show interesting, but it needs to be balanced with strong characterizations and well-developed plots.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think are the most violent shows on TV? Why? What do you mean by violence? Give examples of different types of violence. Who are the usual victims of violence? Do you see the consequences of violence such as injuries, pain, psychological problems?

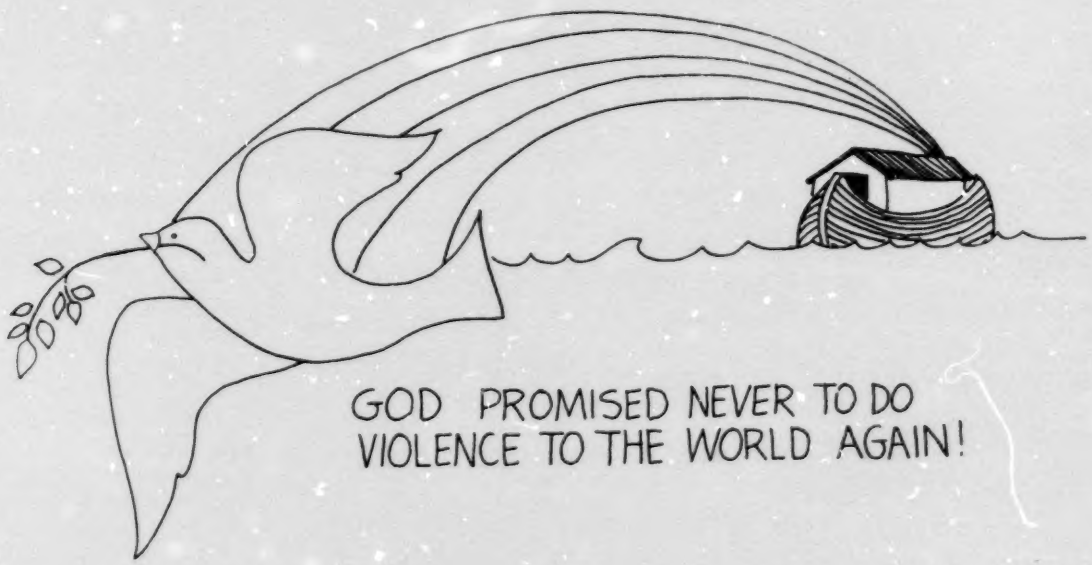
2. Do you feel that there is too much violence in TV? Why or why not? If your answer is yes, what can you do about it?

3. Many parents and TV critics label cartoons as violent. What do you think about this? Is it the same kind of violence that would be on "Magnum P.I." or "The A-Team?" Have you ever seen children imitating TV violence?

4. Describe a character on TV and the inner problem he or she faced. Was the problem solved? Was it a realistic solution?

5. Describe an episode of a series in which a character faced a conflict of values. For example, the person is torn between friendship and doing what is right. What is more important? Have you ever had similar pressures in your life?

6. Describe a TV sports event where the players were not playing fair or were not getting along with others. What do you think when you see players fighting on the field? What other ways could be used to resolve these conflicts?



(Genesis 7 and 8)

Activities

1. Watch three action shows during the week. Fill in the information listed below for each of the shows.

Show	Violent Act or Verbal Aggression	Who Committed It	Why	Results

2. Jot down in the coming week the examples of name-calling and aggressive sayings you hear on TV. Does the TV laugh track encourage you to laugh at put-downs? How do you feel about such put-downs? Do you and your friends use such sayings? Do you believe that "sticks and stones will break your bones, but names will never hurt you?"
3. Make a report which compares a TV news story about violence with a newspaper report on the same story. What were the differences between them? Which one was more sensationalized? Which more objective?
4. There are many conflict stories in the Bible. Pick a story, determine the kinds of conflicts and the main characters' actions, and discuss the values with which they are struggling. Use Matthew 18:21-35; Mark 15:1-16; Luke 16:19-31—or choose your own.
5. Watch three programs of the same type. Keep a log showing program, conflict, alternatives, resolution, values.

Program	Conflict	Alternative	Resolution	Values

6. Heroes and Models

Follow the Stars

We all like to imagine ourselves in situations as other people. In television's make-believe world there are many opportunities to identify with one or another character as we watch. What would it feel like to have so much power, to be involved in such danger, to be married to that person? What would it be like to travel to an exotic place or have unlimited amounts of money or to be able to solve the mystery easily?

It's easy to be a hero on television with a scriptwriter to help outsmart villains, beat the odds and rid the world of evil. Certainly we are not bionic women, six-million-dollar men or incredible hulks in real life. But in television's fantasy land we are invited to pretend that we too can be big-time winners. Identifying with characters is fun, but it is also a learning process. We are forming images of ourselves in the fun-house mirror of TV characters. We can try them on for size and see what fits and what does not.

Everyone needs a hero, someone who represents the good side of people, someone who is all the things we might like to be ourselves. A hero helps us to imagine ourselves doing good things. When we identify with a hero, he or she becomes a role model. Television provides some positive role models—tolerant fathers, loving mothers, talented young people. Can you think of others? It also shows us negative models such as crooked cops and dishonest business people.

As Christians we have very definite role models in Jesus, heroes from scripture, and saintly people throughout the ages of the church. Television occa-

A scene from "Jesus of Nazareth" first broadcast in 1977.

sionally portrays such extraordinary role models. Usually, however, we have to watch for Christian values in the lives of ordinary people.

Our TV role models tell us something about what society values. We need to reflect carefully on how our values compare and/or contrast with those shown on TV. If we look at our most popular shows, they often deal with rich people. "Dallas," "Dynasty," "Falcon Crest," "Hart to Hart" and "Different Strokes" are just a few examples. They rely heavily on the use of stereotypes. Women are often beautiful, but dumb. Kids are seen as problems, minority groups are often the criminals and old people don't have significant roles. We don't have many blacks, Hispanic, Oriental or handicapped stars. So if your heroes and models were only from TV, you could become very frustrated. Most of us don't live extraordinary lives and never will, yet we seldom see a show where very ordinary life is portrayed.

However, the real Christian heroes of life are the very ordinary people who live each day in an extraordinary way. These are the people who live out the gospel message by caring for others, being honest, forgiving others, and making prayer an important part of their lives.

Sometimes TV may present such people to us through the news. We see the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Lech Walesa in recognition of his struggle for human and economic rights of the working people in Poland, and to Mother Teresa who, with her sisters, cares day in and day out for the sick and poor and dying in India. We often see local people who serve as volunteers to help provide food and shelter for the needy. The local news programs frequently do special feature stories on families who adopt handicapped children, church groups who sponsor refugees, youth involved in special service projects or volunteer aids at hospitals or nursing homes, as well as many other people who carry out the Christian message of serving people in need.

When looking at heroes and models, we can learn something from TV but we have to be sure we are getting a clear picture of our total society and all the people who live in it. We need to be critical of TV's presentation of life. We need to find models of good living in our family, school, parish and neighborhood. Start noticing how people act. Some do look out for others, they are considerate, they can be understanding and forgiving. Some people try to be peacemakers. They are the real heroes and heroines that we can follow.

Discussion Questions

1. Who are some characters on television you would consider heroes or role models? Why? What is a superhero? Give some TV examples. Name something your favorite character or hero would never do. Why?
2. What character do you dislike the most? Why? What would you change in this character to make him/her more likable?
3. Debate the following statement in class: "TV characters and celebrities influence our choice of clothes, the way we talk, our hobbies and interests, our topics of conversation in school, and even the way we behave."
4. Discuss the following statement: "Television, more than any other source, provides teens with models of people they admire." A poll taken in 1982 resulted in the following statistics about role models: television (27%), movies (22%), print (14%), live adults (20%), peers (17%).
5. What positive qualities do you most admire in TV role models?
6. Why has Fonzie of "Happy Days" been so popular among young people? Do youth see him as a hero or role model? List some teenage characters currently on TV. Discuss how these characters are realistic and unrealistic. Can the class agree on any one teen character most admired?
7. How often have you been shown a TV superhero who is religious? Why is it that the truly Christian person is not seen often on TV? Do you think that such a program could be successful? Why or why not?
8. Can ordinary people be superheroes? Do you know anyone you would call a superhero? What extraordinary events or personal characteristics make this person a superhero?

Activities

1. Ask your parents if they have any favorite TV characters and why. What characters don't they like and why?
2. Conduct a poll among class members to find out whom they admire the most in the world today. Perhaps you can extend the poll to the entire school or at least another class. After tabulating the results, compare them to the 1982 poll of 4000 junior high students who were asked the same question. Twenty-seven of the 30 top heroes were entertainers in either TV or movies; three sports figures completed the list. Leading role model: Burt Reynolds, followed by Richard Pryor and Alan Alda. Although half those polled were girls, only five women made the list. Brooke Shields was fourth.
3. Write to one of your favorite TV stars. Contact your public library for the address. Ask this star about the three things in life that make him or her the happiest. Compare and contrast the responses you receive. How do their responses affect the image which you had of these stars?
4. Write a response to this statement: We need heroes now more than ever before.
5. What TV character do you identify with the most? Take a sheet of paper and divide it in two. On one side list all the positive qualities and virtues of this person which you would like to imitate. On the other side, list those things about this person (i.e., lifestyle, job, relationships) which you find less desirable and which you would like to avoid. Share your paper with two other students.
6. Select one hero or heroine from the Old or New Testament. Make a list of as many character traits and values of this person as possible. Create a collage from magazine pictures and graphics which portray these characteristics in modern life.

7. Relationships
Getting Along with Others

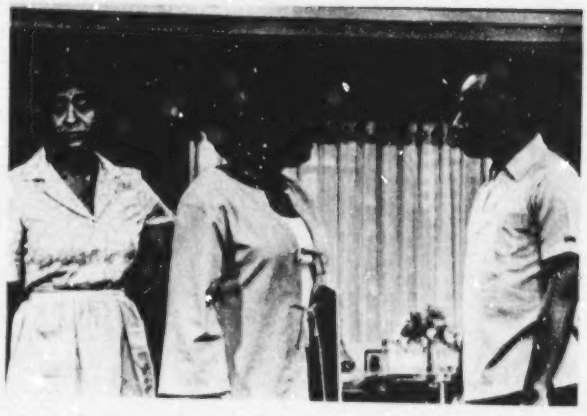
Hair: Blonde Occupation: ?
Eyes: Blue Favorite Pastimes: Dating, giggling
Age: 20s I.Q. Level: Low

Who is she? She's Chrissy, the character played by Suzanne Sommers on "Three's Company," or any "dumb blonde," typical TV character or stereotype. A stereotype is a generally recognized or simplified character noted for one or more characteristics. What characters on TV do not fit the mold of stereotype like the "dumb blonde?"

The world of TV is inhabited by scores of stereotyped characters because they are easy for us to recognize and they are easy for the writers to create.

Television characters are stereotyped in several ways: by ethnic or racial groups, by age, sex, occupation, religion, even by the region of the country in which they live or by how much they weigh. Think of Boss Hogg, a stereotyped Southern sheriff on "The Dukes of Hazzard," or Shirley, a jolly overweight character on "What's Happening."

When we see members of a group portrayed on TV as being all the same, it influences the way we think about the group and the way we react to them. If we have never known a person in a minority group or a blue collar worker, we may believe that Italians are gangsters or that blue collar workers are dumb and prejudiced like Archie Bunker. Television is not real



"The Jeffersons" poke fun at a variety of stereotypes. Can you name some?

life and we cannot jump to the conclusion that any group of people can be so easily labeled.

Stereotyped characters are usually one-dimensional, that is, we see only one side of them; we never see them as individuals with both virtues and faults. On TV we usually see negative characteristics. Often the humor of a show is based on the predictable and foolish way a stereotyped character acts or dresses or speaks.

Many groups, such as blacks, women or Hispanics that are usually presented as stereotypes, have pressured TV producers into portraying them more realistically. But stereotypes still exist, especially on syndicated programs that are rerun.

In the early days of the movies and television blacks were cast in roles which portrayed them as stupid and made them the butt of the jokes. They were often cast as servants or maids or dancers. Blacks were cast in more positive roles starting in the 60s. For example, Bill Cosby co-starred as a spy in "I Spy," and Dihann Carroll portrayed a nurse in "Julia." But most of the characters on those shows were white.

Then in the 70s, shows like "The Jeffersons," "Good Times" and "What's Happening" began to focus on blacks. "The Jeffersons" is unique because the family is well-to-do. Yet, like earlier black characters, George Jefferson is not a positive figure. He is devious, foolish, loud-mouthed and as much a bigot as Archie Bunker.

There are some examples today of positive black characters. Benson is a smart, intelligent character (though he is still a servant!). On "The White

What do "Laverne and Shirley" say about young working women? Are most young women like those portrayed on television?

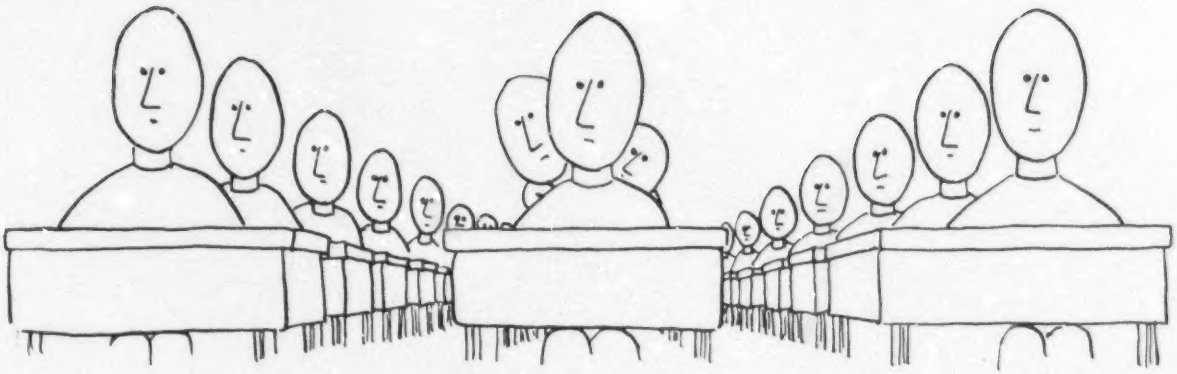
Shadow" blacks and whites are friends, as they are on "Barney Miller." "Fame" showed black teachers and students working together toward the same goals. The extremely successful mini-series "Roots I and II" gave us a rare opportunity to see blacks as complex characters, forced to struggle against hatred and prejudice.

Have you ever heard anyone say something like "You don't look Jewish," or "You don't look like a librarian?" These expressions stereotype people. TV has the power to destroy stereotype images or to reinforce them. Stereotypes are dangerous because we start to believe that they are real, that police officers are brutal, older men and women are grouchy, women are less intelligent than men. When we start to prejudge people based on their group identification, we forget that all of us belong to several groups.

Discussion Questions

1. Name programs in which racial or ethnic minorities have major roles. What kinds of shows are they? Describe how the characters are presented, and think about how they are dressed, how they act, how they talk. Does the character present a good or bad image, or a combination? Is the character a stereotype or more fully developed?
2. Have you ever been offended or uncomfortable about the way TV has presented your ethnic or social group, your religion, your parents' work or your area of the country? Did you write a protest to the network or local station?
3. How are children and teenagers presented on TV? Are they usually stereotyped? If possible, watch TV shows that premiered in the 50s or 60s and compare the teenagers in them with the teenagers in today's programs. Shows from the 50s include "Father Knows Best," "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet," "Leave It to Beaver," "Lassie"; from the 60s, "My Three Sons," "The Brady Bunch," "The Partridge Family."
4. Brainstorm for three minutes as a class, listing as many stereotypes as you can. (Remember that in brainstorming you just call out ideas and have a recorder list them. This is not a time for discussion.) Then ask these questions: Why do I use stereotypes? Has my opinion of these groups been affected by TV? Do I sometimes stereotype groups of people? Is stereotyping a Christian response? If not, why not? How do I help change a stereotype?
5. How do people help relationships grow? Should being a Christian affect relationships? If so, how?

Levar Burton starred in "Roots," Alex Haley's epic portrayal of a black family.



Activities

1. Make a list of 10 or more ethnic groups and name TV characters who belong to them. Use the chart below:

Ethnic Group	Character	Show	Characteristics

   Think about how you know to which group the character belongs, i.e., appearance. What do your classifications tell you about the way we label people? Are there characters on your list who can be grouped Oriental, but which you cannot group more specifically, such as Chinese? Are there ethnic groups that are "invisible" or non-existent on TV?
2. Make a list of occupations and list the characters who work at each job. Is the presentation of the character stereotyped? For example, do you often see mad scientists, old maid librarians, housewives obsessed with scrubbing floors?
3. Divide the class into two groups. Assign one group to monitor the characters who are working women on TV and assign the second group to monitor non-working women on TV. Describe one of these characters in detail and describe in what ways she is or is not stereotyped.
4. Look at several TV programs and describe the typical way in which men are presented. Do you ever see men who are not "macho?" If so, how are they portrayed (such as Felix Unger on "The Odd Couple")?
5. Select a group based on ethnic, race, age, area of the country, etc., and make a collage of the characters on TV who fall into that group. Use photographs from old magazines or draw their faces. On the back of your collage describe the ways in which the characters are the same or different; for example, Barney Miller is not a typical TV police officer.
6. Make a list of all the groups to which you belong: racial, ethnic, economic, religious, age. In what way does TV treat each of those groups?
7. Create a class play which shows the relationships of people in the play to one another.
8. Describe one person in the gospel stories who met Jesus. How did this meeting affect this person? What was the person's relationship with Jesus? Does TV encourage a Christian relationship?

8. Problems and Solutions

To Be Continued . . . Maybe

Everyone of our favorite stories deals with some kind of problem and its solution. Problems and solutions arise from conflicts which are as natural to good stories as they are to human life. The task of the script writer is to define the conflict, give form to the problem and reach an acceptable solution. On a given show all of the conflicts zero in on a specific problem and in the next 22 minutes, if it is a half hour show, they present the problem and find a solution. No matter how complex the subject or how difficult the problem is in reality, the writer is forced to bring its plot to conclusion within a given time frame.

Remington Steele has 44 minutes to work out the problem. He and Laura interview witnesses, chase criminals and quickly solve the problem. Laura has to keep him on the track but sometimes he outsmarts her and draws the right conclusion and gets the job done. Matt on "Goodnight Beantown" has 22 minutes to deal with the right of the press not to divulge the source of a news story. Gonzo Gates has only 44 minutes to carry on his normal hospital work while supervising three resident surgeons. By the end of the show he must decide which residents will be able to become heart surgeons.

Alice is turned down on a singing job because of her age. The night club wants to attract the college crowd. Vera, Mel and their friends try to console her. But finally, after 11 minutes, the owner of the club changes his mind. Alice can sing. The other singer, it turns out, was only 16-years-old and her father would not let her work. Alice then gets her friend, Corey (Mel's mother, who is much older) a chance to sing. All of this is done in 22 minutes.

Because TV stories compress time, the problems are simplified and solved in 22 to 44 minutes, or occasionally in two episodes. McCormick on "Hardcastle and McCormick" always worries about getting in trouble with the law, but the judge takes care of everything. They catch the crooks and solve all the problems and move on to next week.

Situation comedies generally revolve around problems at home or at work. "Alice," "One Day at a Time," "Gimme a Break," "Benson," "The Jeffersons," "The Newhart Show" are all examples. Co-workers

Problems mark each episode of situation comedies, such as this one on "Alice" starring (from left) Beth Howland as Vera; Linda Lavin as Alice; and Vic Tayback as Mel.

are generally portrayed as family. They are loyal and devoted to each other. Whatever the problem, on TV it is solved 99% of the time and the message is always the same: Family/roommates/workers/neighbors stick together. Regardless of how the characters deceive each other or how they yell and scream at each other in the course of the show, they are reunited by the end of it. From one show to another, all are happy again—at least until next week. Turn from one channel to another; you will find that all goes well by the end.

TV dramas offer the same simplified solutions to problems or present only the threat of a serious problem. Fonzie and Richie come to blows over Richie's decision to stay in Milwaukee rather than go to Hollywood as a screenwriter. But somehow they quickly work through the problem and remain friends. The suspense revolves around the threat of their fight.

"... go at once and make peace with your brother, then come back and offer your gift to God."

(Matt. 5:24)

The only exceptions to quick problem solving in TV series are the soaps where the other extreme occurs. The problems go on and on or, once resolved, they are replaced by other problems. On sitcoms and serial shows problems are introduced at the beginning. On the soaps, problems rear up at the end of the show to hook you for the next day or week.

We all face problems and solutions in daily life. We all must choose between good and bad and deal with a lot of grey areas in our choices. Things are not as simply solved as they are on TV. What are some of the problems and difficulties that you must face? How do you solve them? Do family, friends, teachers help you? Consider how Jesus handled problems and conflicting values. Some examples can be found in the following gospel readings: Matthew 4:1-11, 5:21-26, 25:14-30; Mark 10:17-27, 12:13-17; Luke 7:27-38 and John 8:1-11. Could you use these ways of solving problems or the values that the gospel presents in your daily life?

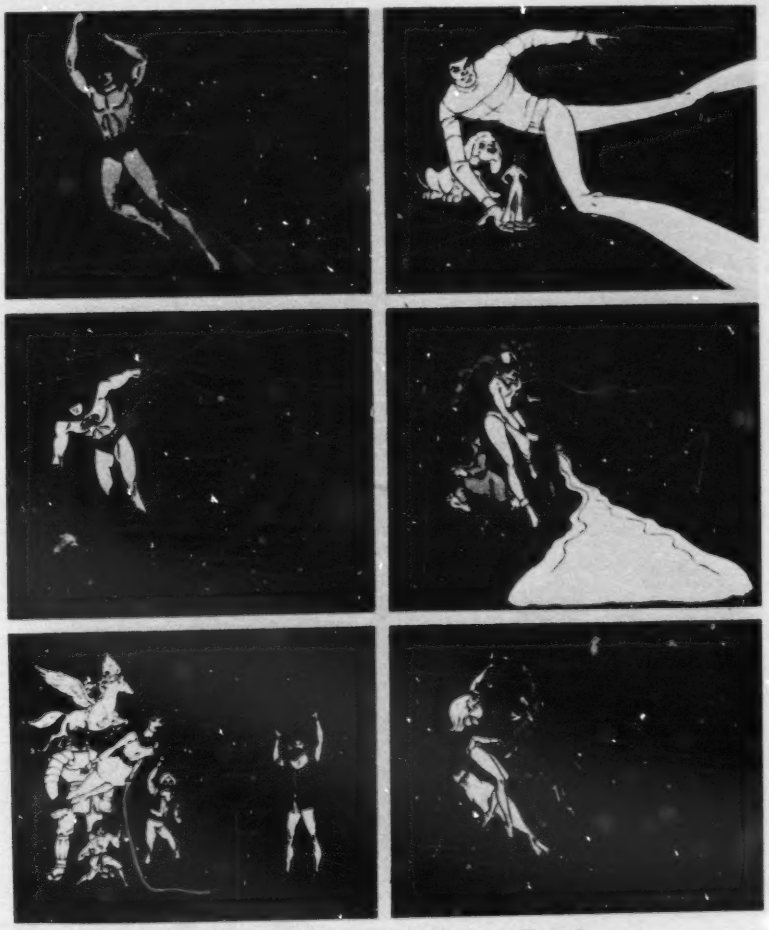
Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite TV family and why? In what ways is your family like them? Different from them? Think about the way you get along with your brothers and sisters, about the way you and your parents interact, about the causes of arguments. Do you and your family often argue about TV?
2. Think about a problem a TV family faced that your family also faced, such as moving to a new town, losing a pet, establishing an age for dating. How was the problem solved on TV? How was it solved at your house? Or is it unresolved?
3. Occasionally problems are left unresolved or "open-ended" on TV. Describe such a program. Were you pleased with the ending or do you prefer a solution?

4. Describe a program which ended unhappily. Was it realistic? Would you have preferred a happy but unrealistic ending? Why?
5. What are typical soap opera problems? Name a character facing such problems. How long has she or he been confronted with it? How real is the problem? In what ways are soaps more realistic than prime time programs? Less realistic? Do you prefer soaps, sitcoms, drama, sports, or news and educational programs? Why?
6. Are the problems that face TV families or workers caused by external forces, i.e., outside the family, or by internal forces, i.e., the personalities of the characters or their reactions?

Activities

1. Keep a log of family-centered shows. Are the parents widowed, divorced, married, remarried? How many children are in the family? How do they treat each other? Describe each of the characters and their roles, for example, does the mother work? Is the father in charge, the father-knows-best type, or is he a bumbler?
2. List the programs that are set in work places such as a police station or office. Describe the jobs, the characters, the usual problems. Are the problems related to the work situation or to the characterizations? How many of the workers' families are visible?
3. Discuss with your parents the way parents are portrayed on TV. Are your parents unhappy or uneasy about their image on TV? Do they feel family-type programs make it easier or more difficult to fulfill their roles as parents?
4. Watch the news for two nights. Identify four top problems in the world. Describe the problem and what world leaders are doing about the problem. What would be your solution to these problems? In groups of four, role play a follow-up news cast about one of the problems and its eventual solution. You may consult your parents to help you with this activity.

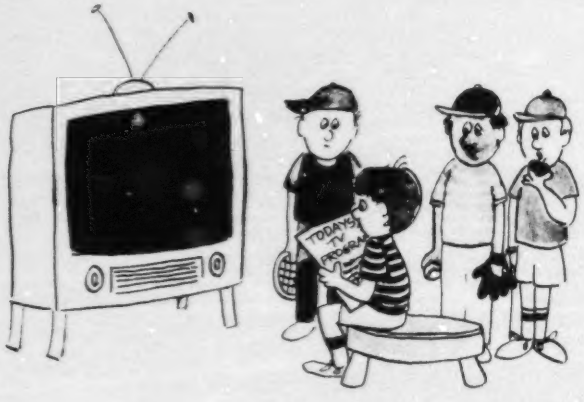


How do cartoons solve problems? Are they realistic?

9. What Do You Watch?

Taming the T.V. Tube

Imagine that you control the power for turning on your television. The electricity to power your TV comes from a generator that is driven by a bicycle. Picture yourself having to pedal the bicycle continuously in order to watch every program of your choice. How would this affect your TV viewing habits? Would this cause you to think seriously about the reasons you watch certain shows?



In the early days of television many homes could receive only one or two channels. Those channels carried programming only during certain hours of the day and evening. The possibilities for viewing were limited and people did many other interesting things with their time. Gradually, TV viewing increased, more stations came into existence, the networks offered more and more programs, around the clock. Now in some of our cities cable television systems with 140 channels are being installed. Think of the effects of all that television viewing!

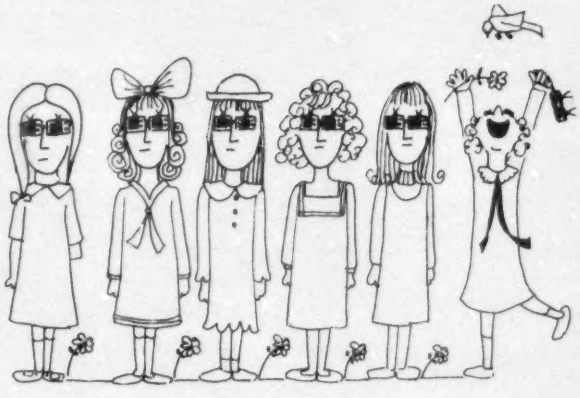
People watch TV for many different reasons. Sometimes they watch out of boredom with life, sometimes out of interest in finding out what is happening in the world, sometimes because everyone else is watching, sometimes because they are attracted to a certain type of story or character. People watch for many reasons, some of them better than others. The fact remains, however, that the average American watches a lot of TV. It has replaced baseball as the national pastime. The danger exists that we consume too much TV. We are becoming overstuffed and bloated from it. It could become a hazard to our well-being—to our physical health, our intellectual health, our moral health, our social health.

Excessive television viewing can harm our physical health because it keeps us inactive and deprives us of the exercise and fresh air our bodies need. It affects our intellectual health because it takes time away from activities that stimulate our minds and challenge our thinking skills. Our moral well-being is adversely affected by the many false values which TV portrays hour after hour. Finally, TV presents obstacles to our social health, that is, to our relationships with other people. When we are glued to the TV set, it is difficult to be in contact with others, to communicate effectively, to develop our friendships.

To counteract these dangers of TV viewing, we need a personal TV diet. A diet is intended to bring balance, nutrition and the proper amounts to what we consume. A TV diet would help us achieve a balance in the kinds of programs we watch; quality in the programs we choose to nourish us; and the right amount of TV viewing so we can stay in the best shape possible. A solid and consistent diet will put us in control of TV rather than allowing TV to control our lives.

We are in control of TV when we can ask key questions such as: "Why am I turning on the television?" "How long will I watch it?" "What else is there I have to do?" "What did I get out of what I saw?" "Is this a worthwhile way to spend my time?" By asking ourselves questions such as these we become "critical viewers." We know that television programming is a mix of the good, the fair and the poor. We keep our eyes open for the best, we watch sparingly, we evaluate intelligently the programs we experience.

Becoming a "critical viewer" does not happen overnight. This is a skill that we have to develop with practice. What is important is that we know what it means and that we begin to develop this skill. One of the best places to begin is by talking with our parents, teachers and other adult friends about our TV view-



"DR., I HAVE THIS UNCONTROLLABLE URGE TO TURN ON THE T.V."

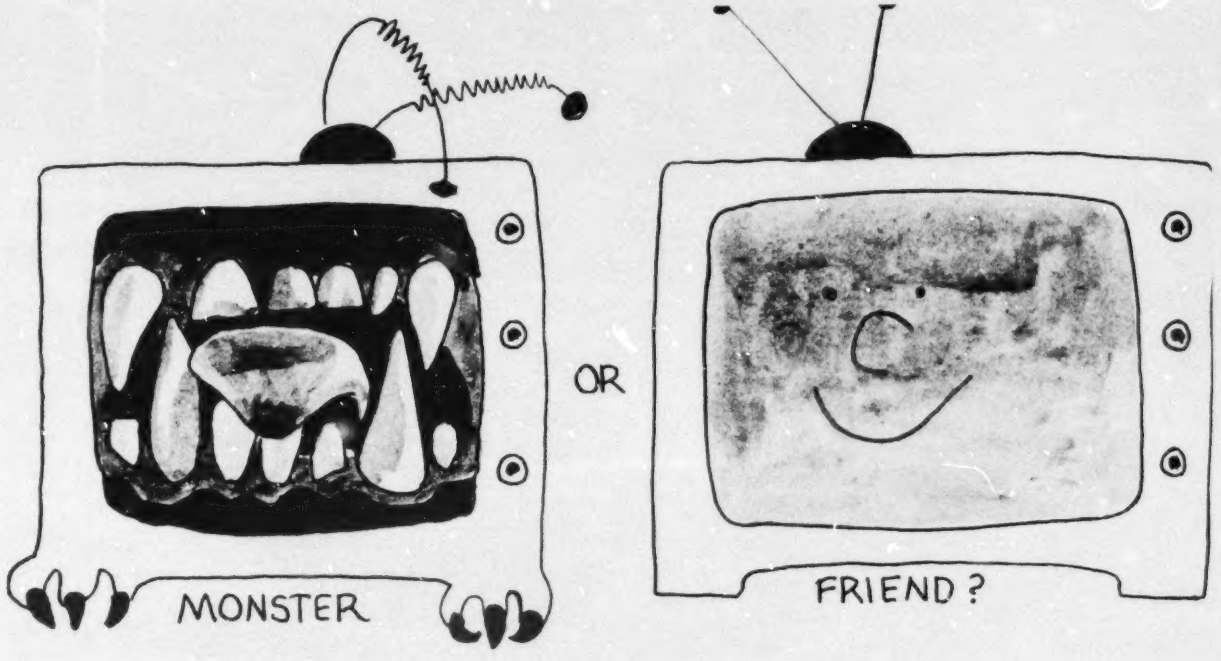
ing and about particular programs we watch. Trusted people can be our best guides. But there are other guides, such as TV listings and reviews, which we should use regularly to help us find the very best programs when we choose to be TV viewers. We need to keep our eyes and ears open to all the help available.

Television is an important form of communication for both entertainment and learning. We need to take TV seriously. There is a new twist to an old saying: "We become what we watch." Developing good TV habits and becoming "critical viewers" can be matters of life and health.

Discussion Questions

1. How much TV do you watch? Have you noticed any changes in your TV viewing habits since you began this study? Look at the continuum below. Mark on the line with an X where you "fit." Discuss your responses with the class.

Blurry-eyed Betty who never turns it off ——— No-knob Norbert who never turns it on



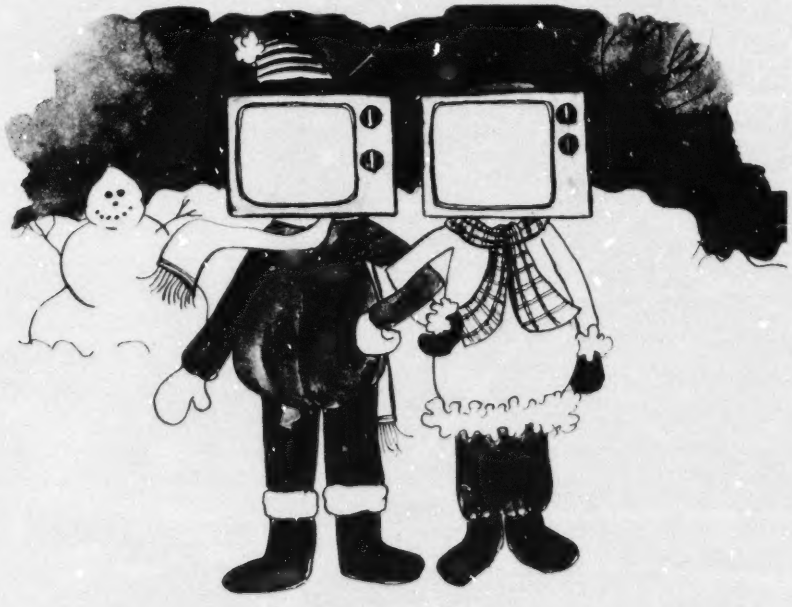
2. TV is both educational and entertaining. Do you lean toward seeing television as more one than the other? How much of each would you incorporate into your ideal TV diet? Would that give you a balanced and nutritious diet?
3. When you buy a modern appliance today, you usually receive a booklet of directions on how to operate it. Suppose you are writing such a manual for television. What would you say about the best ways to use the machine?
4. What would a TV network run entirely by junior high students look like? What kinds of programs? Hours of broadcasting? Stars and personalities?
5. What would happen to the world if, through some mysterious force, TV reception was made impossible? How would such a happening affect you, your family and friends, the U.S. and the world?
6. Suppose you decide that you would like to watch less TV in the future. What are the alternatives? Brainstorm with the class a list of as many different activities as you can. Make suggestions realistic and possible to do.

Activities

1. Here is a list of some reasons why people watch television. Which ones apply to you? Can you think of others? List them. Ask your parents to share which ones apply to them.

—entertainment	—information	—for company
—relaxation	—destroy silence	—education
—pass time	—forget problems	—assignment
—it's just there	—get away from people	—conversation topic

2. Imagine that you are a parent making rules about family television viewing. Individually and as a class write them down. Compare your rules with the ones actually made by the families of students in your class.
3. Suppose you are an expert at curing people who feel they are "TV addicts." Role play being in your clinic and telling the addict about your cure therapy. Either get someone to volunteer to be the "addict" or speak to the entire class.
4. Make a list of all the available resources of information about upcoming TV programs. Bring to class some examples, i.e. *TV Guide*, newspaper reviews, magazine articles. Set up a special bulletin board or display area for these materials. Which ones are most helpful? Can you write similar reviews of TV programs you see, using these as models? Try it.
5. Since October 1979, more than 10,000 children have written the Federal Communications Commission (Consumer Assistance Office, Room 258, 1919 M St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20580) telling members what they think about TV. Plan to write letters in class and send them to the FCC. Or write a letter to one of the four major networks. Your teacher has the address.
6. Write an essay for your *TV Scrapbook* that tells about your attitude toward TV as a result of studying this course. How have you changed? What effect has this program had on your family's TV viewing habits? What new insights do you have about the power and the possibilities of television in our world?



What does the Media Mirror reflect?